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Oklahoma and Texas, except High Plains Area

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DISTRICTS LAW A MILESTONE IN CONSERVATION

By Louis P. Merrill
Regional Conservator

The passage of the State Soil Conservation Districts Law during the present session of the Texas legislature marks another milestone in the progress toward the conservation of the indispensable soil resources of the state.

For many years preceeding 1930, considerable effort was put forth by state agencies in Texas toward the control of erosion on agricultural lands. From this work much good has resulted particularly in bringing about widespread consciousness on the part of our people of the severity of the problem and the fact that something had to be done about it.

In 1930 the Federal Government inaugurated cooperative research work in soil conservation with the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station. From that work we learned that we could not rely on two or three measures for adequate control but that each parcel of land must be treated in accordance with its needs and adaptabilities. This new conception called for fitting the adapted practices to the land rather than attempting to fit the land to the known methods of control.

During the past six years the Soil Conservation Service in cooperation with the state agencies and the farmers has put into effect a relatively large number of demonstration and CCC soil conservation projects in the different erosion problem areas of the state. The work in these areas was designed to make a practical field application of such knowledge as had been obtained from experiment and experience and to develop as many new practical measures as possible which could be used for control purposes under the many conditions of soil type, slope,

rainfall, degree of erosion, and land use. This work has been used at the same time to demonstrate a complete conservation program to more than 50,000 farmers and ranchers who have visited the areas to study the work. While serving these purposes, the program has been completed on more than one and one-third million acres of Texas land and a nucleus of high quality personnel has been given fundamental training and experience in the application of coordinated control.

The principal significance of the State Soil Conservation Law lies in the fact that hereafter the responsibility for erosion control operations will rest squarely in the hands of the people who own and operate the farm and ranch lands of Texas. The principal deviation of the Texas law from those already passed by 34 other states of the nation is the provision of a State Soil Conservation Board composed entirely of farmers. The provisions of the law are thoroughly democratic with an opportunity for an expression of the majority's will at each important stage of its operation.

Two years have been required to pass the law in Texas and it is further significant that the farm leaders of Texas, headed by V. C. Marshall of Temple, decided upon the type of legislation required and then guided it through to its final enactment.

Time may prove that from the standpoint of physical, economic, and social values, the State Conservation Law is the most important piece of agricultural legislation ever enacted within the State of Texas.

Based on the experience of other states, districts should be created for the purpose of self-help, that is, the benefits which can be had through concerted cooperative action in education regarding the problem and its control, in securing and exchanging materials, equipment and labor, in a recognition of the natural boundaries which influence the problem and in a unification of plans for common problems which include not only conservation but utilization of the soil resources. This approach is mentioned as desirable because it is obvious that for some time to come at least there may be more districts organized than there will be aid from Federal, State or other agencies with which to provide assistance. The fact that the law provides that district supervisors need not invite or accept outside help unless they choose to do so would indicate that it is the responsibility of the people residing within the district to go to the very limit in meeting their own problems.

To prosecute such a program requires a high type of leadership among the farmers and ranchers. In this connection there are those who question the ability of the agricultural people to administer their own affairs but probably no better leadership can be found in any phase of our American life than among those who deal directly with the land. It is true that the opportunity for a demonstration of this particular ability has been much greater in fields other than agriculture but with developments such as the Soil Conservation Law, the landowner and operator are given an opportunity to use real leadership and we do not fear the outcome.

In re-emphasizing that farmers should be prepared to conduct certain phases of the program under the new law on the basis of self-help, may we also point to some outside aids which might be helpful, when available. So long as there exists a difference in what we know and what we need to know about soil and water conservation, there will be reason for a continuation of the research work which the State and Federal government now has under way. Of similar importance are the media through which the information gleaned from experiment and experience may be carried to the people on the land, a service now rendered by our agricultural colleges, the Extension Service and vocational agriculture. To avoid costly mistakes and to insure the effectiveness of the applied measures there is a need for surveys which would reveal the factors affecting runoff and soil losses and the type of treatment best suited to the land. It follows that there is a need for technical assistance to make these surveys, to develop a complete, coordinated program for each farm, and to assist the operator in the establishment of control measures such as has been done by the Soil Conservation Service.

Only time will indicate the amount of funds necessary for the successful operation of a widespread soil conservation program. The present law has provided funds to the State Board for administrative purposes with which to conduct the work in Texas. This satisfies an immediate direct need for setting up districts to get the program under way.

An indirect need for funds is represented in the services which may be expected of the above mentioned organizations. Whether or not these agencies can meet added demands for assistance in the district program will depend in a large measure upon the funds made available to them.

While districts have operated successfully in several states for more than a year, it should be recognized that this approach to the problem of soil and water losses is yet new and should therefore be used with care and deliberation.

An attitude marked by patience, tolerance and sympathetic co-operation on the part of the people toward the State Board and the district supervisors will mean much in the proper creation and functioning of these new subdivisions of the state.

Our soil and water must be conserved. Conservation is a primary responsibility of those who own and control the land. Districts provide the best machinery yet devised for solving the problem in a democratic manner. Until a better way is found, the districts are entitled to wholehearted support from every citizen of the state.

LOUISIANA AND TEXAS SCHOOLS SCHEDULE CONSERVATION COURSES

Soil and water conservation discussions are included in courses dealing with conservation of natural resources now being conducted at one Louisiana college and in 12 Texas colleges and universities.

This type of course had its inception last summer at North Texas State Teachers College at Denton. This year, lecturers are discussing soil and water conservation at the state teachers colleges at Denton, Commerce, Nacogdoches, San Marcos, Huntsville, Alpine and Canyon, Texas; at Texas A. & M. College, College Station; at Texas College of Arts and Industries at Kingsville; University of Texas, Austin; Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, and at Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, Ruston.

Dr. H. H. Bennett, chief of the Soil Conservation Service, Washington, D. C., will be the featured speaker of the course at Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, July 21. His subject will be "The Enlarged Program of the Soil Conservation Service".

The subjects being discussed in most of the Texas courses are: "Introduction to the Study of Soil and Water Conservation", "Social and Economic Effects of Soil Erosion", "A Program of Soil and Water Conservation and Proper Land Use", "Farm Planning", "Pasture and Range Management in Soil and Water Conservation", "Agronomic Practices in Soil and Water Conservation", "Soil and Water Conservation Engineering", "Woodland and Wildlife Management in Relation to Soil and Water Conservation", "Soil and Water Conservation in Flood Control", and "The Teacher's Opportunity in a Soil and Water Conservation Program."

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REGION 4 HAS GOOD SAFETY RECORD

Region 4 ranked high in safety in comparison with the entire Soil Conservation Service during the first quarter of 1939.

In the severity rating (number of days lost per 1,000 man-hours), Region 4 had the best ranking - .121 in comparison with .706 for the entire Service. In the frequency rating (number of disabling injuries per million man-hours), this region placed third with a rating of 7.19 compared with 11.01 for the entire Service.

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LOUISIANA FARMERS REQUEST ASSISTANCE FROM DISTRICTS

As of May 31, a total of 760 farmers had applied to the Louisiana soil conservation districts for assistance in the establishment of coordinated conservation systems on the 223,280 acres of land they control.

Thirty agreements had been signed at that time covering 4,427 acres. In addition 142 other farms, covering 27,442 acres, were in process of planning.

Conservation surveys have been completed on 91,562 acres in the six operating districts.

Twenty-two educational meetings, attended by 755 persons, were conducted in May.

The State Soil Conservation Committee in Louisiana announced the appointment of the following district supervisors: Grand Coteau Ridge, Bernard S. Dessens of St. Martin Parish and Oneal Fontenot of Evangeline Parish; Lower East Red River, John S. Lawrence of Rapides Parish and Ernest B. Moseberg of Winn Parish; Lower West Red River, George Kelly of Natchitoches Parish and James R. Hoyt of Rapides Parish; Calcasieu District, A. C. R. Turner of Allen Parish, and W. Riley Sanderson of Rapides Parish.

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APPLICATION OF CONSERVATION MEASURES IS SPEEDY

Arkansas farmers are wasting no time in beginning the establishment of conservation systems on their land after they enter into agreements with their soil conservation districts.

The case of E. C. Bowden of Booneville, Ark., is cited as an example. One hour after he received the plan of conservation operations for his farm, Mr. Bowden began the construction of contour ridges to conserve the moisture and to help control erosion on an 11-acre pasture.

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THREE NEW OKLAHOMA DISTRICTS GRANTED ASSISTANCE

Three additional Oklahoma soil conservation districts have entered into memoranda of understanding with the Department of Agriculture to obtain the assistance of Soil Conservation Service personnel in the establishment of coordinated conservation systems on individual farms.

The three districts are Central North Canadian, covering about 106,240 acres in parts of Blaine and Canadian Counties; Muskogee-Okmulgee embracing approximately 601,600 acres in Muskogee County and in part of Okmulgee County, and Northern Hughes County, covering about 161,280 acres in Hughes County.

Oklahoma now has 16 soil conservation districts which have entered into memoranda of understanding with the Department.

As of May 31, conservation surveys had been completed on 693,389 acres in the 13 districts then operating.

At that time 2,025 farmers had applied to the supervisors in their respective districts for agreements. A total of 505 agreements had been signed covering 78,110 acres. In addition, 19 farm plans had been completed and were awaiting signature of farmers who operate 2,900 acres.

Plans on 232 farms having a total area of 50,147 acres were in process of completion May 31.

Thirty-nine educational meetings, attended by 880 persons, were held in Oklahoma districts in May. One meeting with 128 farmers was held on planning and program execution.

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EDITORS ENDORSE DISTRICT PROGRAM

The Texas Press Association at its 60th annual convention in Lubbock, Texas, June 8-10 unanimously passed a resolution endorsing the program made possible by the State Soil Conservation Law. Association members were urged "to give what assistance they can to the State Soil Conservation Board in acquainting Texas landowners with their new opportunities in the conservation of their soil, water, timber, and wildlife resources."

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DISTRICT PROGRESS IN ARKANSAS

Conservation surveys had been completed on 1,720,126 acres in the 12 soil conservation districts in Arkansas as of June 1.

The report showed that a total of 3,978 farmers had applied to the supervisors of their respective districts for assistance.

District agreements covering 216,397 acres had been signed on June 1 by 1,631 farm owners. At that time, 171 farm plans embracing 22,524 acres were being prepared. In addition, 109 farm plans covering 14,350 acres had been completed and were pending signature by the farmers.

Fifty-six educational meetings were held in Arkansas soil conservation districts last month, with a total attendance of 2,464 persons. Three other meetings were held with a total of 43 persons to discuss planning and program execution. The supervisors of the various districts held a total of 20 meetings.

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OKLAHOMA WATER FACILITIES PROJECTS APPROVED

The establishment of three Water Facilities Projects in the Western Oklahoma counties of Harper, Beaver, and Ellis was announced this month by the Department of Agriculture.

Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace, approved these new projects for planning:

Cimarron River Watershed Project: 488,320 acres lying in the watershed of the Cimarron River in Harper County.

North Canadian River Watershed Project: Approximately 442,560 acres in the watershed of the North Canadian River in Beaver County.

North Canadian River Watershed Project: 269,120 acres lying in the watershed of the North Canadian River in Harper and Ellis Counties.

The approval of these three new areas increases the number of water facilities projects in Oklahoma to six.

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BENNETT STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF DISTRICT LAW

The enactment of state soil conservation districts laws, such as those now effective in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana, indicates that the people of these states are determined to put a stop to wholesale land wastage which has already destroyed for any productive use more than 50,000,000 acres of agricultural land in the United States, Dr. H. H. Bennett, Chief of the Service said on a recent visit to this region.

Dr. Bennett participated in the Temple project tour and field day on May 29 and spoke at a soil conservation rally sponsored by proponents of soil conservation in Texas.

"The passage of the districts law in 35 states is the culmination of a conservation movement which has grown from a mere dream of a few years ago to an active force winning a battle against land decline," Dr. Bennett declared. "I see the soil conservation districts law as the greatest mechanism yet created for the conservation of agricultural resources in Texas as well as the other states that have adopted this legislation."

Pointing to the damage which improper land use has caused in Texas, Dr. Bennett said that the settlers who drifted into this state more than a hundred years ago brought with them the improper farming practices which had helped to wear out farms in their native states.

"In this big state they went about the job of wasting the land in a big way. Land that never should have been cleared was put into cultivation. In the cotton belt, in particular, the land was farmed year in and year out in a way that wasted soil. Lumbermen felled the forests, and the grassy plains were plowed up. The ranges were overgrazed and the fields were overworked," he said.

"Today take a look at what has happened. Over 9 million acres have been destroyed by erosion--eroded to such an extent that they can no longer be tilled. This damage has been wrought by sheet and gully erosion. Another million and a quarter acres have been destroyed by wind erosion. Thirteen million acres are severely eroded and on the verge of destruction. Another 80 million acres are moderately eroded.

Dr. Bennett stressed the fact that soil erosion is a physical injury to the land which means ultimate injury to many by pointing out that "soil erosion and human erosion go hand in hand," and by citing examples of reduced crop yields caused by erosion and the subsequent reduction of soil fertility.

"People living on land made hopelessly poor by erosion sink to a low social and economic level. To those who feel the tragedy of the land wasted through unwise use, erosion is not a threat of the future but a present day handicap that throttles them to a condition of

poverty. Men trying to farm patches between gullies and exposed sub-soil are striving to support their families. Their status generally amounts to bankrupt farming on bankrupt land," the soils specialist declared.

Listing the national erosion damage toll, Dr. Bennett told his audience that:

Over the past century and a half careless and destructive methods of land use have led to the serious damage or outright ruin of 280 million acres of farm and grazing land. From an area larger than the combined areas of the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Arkansas all, or most of the original top-soil is gone.

From more than 775 million other acres one fourth to three fourths of the top-soil is gone. A billion acres, half of all our grazing and farm lands combined, have been ruined or damaged by erosion.

"With some 3 billion tons of soil washing from the farms of America every year we are losing the equivalent of 200 forty-acre farms every day or nearly 3,000,000 acres every year.

Some 740 million tons of soil are dumped into the Gulf of Mexico every year, but many more millions of tons are dropped along the way to choke stream channels, clog drainage canals, cover rich bottomlands with unproductive soil and fill costly reservoirs."

Indicating that it would be impossible for state or federal governments to apply corrective soil conservation practices to all lands in the country that need it, Dr. Bennett said that wide-spread conservation would only be realized when the farmers themselves took the responsibility for bringing such a program to their own communities through the organization of districts.

"The districts movement is a people's movement--a movement from the ground up. I can't help but believe that it is a great step toward a more perfectly functioning democracy. The soil conservation district is a means of adjusting our democratic form of government to the modern needs of land reform," he said.

From a national standpoint the significance of the districts lies in the opportunity for a tremendous increase in the spread of soil conservation work, Dr. Bennett explained. "Now that farmers are organizing their own soil conservation districts and assuming responsibility for protection of their own national resources, a much broader attack on the erosion problem becomes a possibility," he declared.

MANY FARMERS REQUEST WATER FACILITIES

Ten water facilities projects in Texas and two in Oklahoma in Region 4 have received applications from more than 640 farmers and ranchers who control more than 277,000 acres. These men seek to establish water facilities on their lands, to install coordinated soil and water conservation measures and to adopt farm and home management plans.

According to reports sent to J. J. Coyle, regional water facilities administrator, more than 100 applications covering approximately 26,000 acres had been approved.

The projects covered by this report have headquarters at Midland, Colorado City, Pleasanton, Stamford, Spur, Brady, Uvalde, Abilene, San Angelo, Balmorea, in Texas, and at Hollis and Cheyenne in Oklahoma. Three other water facilities projects also have been approved for the Oklahoma part of Region 4.

The water facilities program is the joint responsibility of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the Farm Security Administration and the Soil Conservation Service.

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Conservation surveys had been completed in the Mine Creek, Magazine, Poteau River and Illinois Bayou Soil Conservation Districts as of June 1.

The number of square miles reported surveyed in each district is as follows: Mine Creek, 140; Magazine, 108; Poteau River, 172, and Illinois Bayou, 285.

According to the regional surveys section, conservation surveys had been completed June 1 on 3,859 square miles in soil conservation districts in the Region 4 section of Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. This total was distributed among the three states as follows: Arkansas, 2,681 square miles; Louisiana, 105 square miles, and Oklahoma, 1,073 square miles.

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METHODS OF HARVESTING LITTLE BLUESTEM SEED

By R. C. Mauldin

Little Bluestem (Andropogon scoparius) grass seed may be harvested in several ways. Where growing in a mixture and pure seed is wanted, hand-cutting with an abbreviated sickle called a grass knife has been found cheap and practical for small amounts as well as large quantities of seed. The tops are cut off and sacked. Other methods include the use of the cylinder seed stripper and the combine. But none of these methods permits easy curing of the material for later plantings.

After several methods were tested it was found that to facilitate curing, handling, and threshing, the ordinary grain binder is both a suitable and a cheap way to cut the seed material. Curing can be done in the shock. The use of grain-saving guards will reduce the number of plants or stems of plants that tend to lodge, especially when row plantings are harvested.

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MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING GRANTED 106 DISTRICTS

A total of 106 soil conservation districts in 23 states had entered into memoranda of understanding with the Department of Agriculture on June 1, according to the Division of Cooperative Relations and Planning of the Service.

Oklahoma continued to lead the nation in the number of such districts, with a total of 15. Arkansas was second, with 12 districts which have received approval of memoranda of understanding.

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